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## Environmentalists, Transportation Officials Discuss Terms of Arrangement

The Howard County Environmental Sustainability Board said it wants to see methodology of studies conducted for train-truck project in Elkridge area.

Elkridge Patch

By [Elizabeth Janney](#)

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An environmental board that advises Howard County legislators met with transportation officials Thursday to discuss the state of a train-truck project under consideration for Howard County.

It was the second time that the Environmental Sustainability Board met with officials from Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) and CSX since Howard County passed a resolution outlining the partnership in June.

According to the resolution, the board is tasked with "monitoring and reviewing the environmental assessment or impact statement..." generated as MDOT and CSX study sites on Race Road and Montevideo Road for a potential train-truck facility.

"It's a first," said Bradley Smith, project manager for MDOT. He explained that a local council had not before dictated this type of participation. However, he added that "there are a lot of firsts" in the project, which aims to bring the first intermodal facility to Maryland that will allow freight containers to be double-stacked on trains and exchanged with trucks using electric cranes.

Smith and Sharon Daboin of CSX presented about 30 minutes' worth of information at the Dec. 8 meeting, material that was displayed at a series of public workshops in November containing preliminary research around the four candidate sites.

After Smith and Daboin briefed the Howard County Environmental Sustainability Board—a group of approximately 15 citizens and county employees with expertise ranging from health to agriculture—they discussed next steps, though few details were nailed down.

"Let's cut to the chase," said Ned Tillman, chair of the board. "When do we actually participate? Is it [when you have produced] a final document, or do we have some input now? What do you envision?"

Smith left the timeline and level of participation up to the board.

“It can really be based on what you guys would like to see,” said Smith. “We can come out and meet every couple of months; whatever works.”

He said that the document containing environmental studies from the candidate sites would likely not be completed until late 2012.

“We really want to see your methodology before we talk to you again,” said Mark Southerland, the sustainability board’s resident expert on the federal document, which goes through a process outlined in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

After the meeting, Southerland told Patch that he works for a company that does environmental consulting; he said he has worked on "scores" of NEPA documents and has written them for the Department of Defense and other federal agencies.

“They're actually doing more than some other agencies are doing so far," said Southerland of MDOT and CSX. "But we haven't seen the meat yet."

He said the "meat" is the "actual analysis of what they think the impacts are."

Continued Southerland: "What they've shown us so far is things they're looking at and some of the data they're using, but there's no analysis yet. They're showing us there are some wetlands there, but are they going to count the wetlands, [or] are they going to compare the quality of the wetlands? Those simple ways of doing analysis are quite different."

At its next meeting with transportation officials, the Environmental Sustainability Board said it would like to see information about thresholds—what CSX and MDOT consider to be a significant amount of noise, for example—and an explanation of how consultants decided on those numbers.

Smith and Tillman said after the meeting that they anticipated CSX and MDOT would return for a report before the Environmental Sustainability Board around March 2012.